

The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY, BELFAST.

No. 6.]

BELFAST, JUNE 1st, 1881,

[For Gratuitous Circulation.]

NOW that our Jubilee celebrations are over, and affairs are somewhat quieted down, we are able to look back upon the brilliant series of meetings which was held, and to form a calm judgment of their value and influence. They cannot fail to do good to us all, and make us more earnest than ever in our desire to make our friends and neighbours acquainted with the ennobling principles of our faith. And they will assuredly exercise an influence upon us all in our various fields of work, stirring us up to greater activities and to a larger fidelity. We must now all put our hands more resolutely to the plough, and be resolved to do our very best to promote the best interest of our Society and of our Free Churches.

Very pleasant is the way in which our English brethren have spoken and written about our meetings. We reprint in our present issue, with great satisfaction, an article from the *London Inquirer*, which we are sure will be read with great interest by all our friends. The writer has done justice to our position and our aims, and the expression of sympathy which he gives on behalf of our English brethren is highly esteemed by us all.

The event of the past month is the issue of the Revised version of the New Testament. It has been ten years in preparation, and its appearance has been waited for with great anxiety. In many respects it will reward those who have been anxious for a more correct rendering of the original Greek. It is certainly a great improvement upon the authorised version, and it ought to replace that version in our Pulpits and in our homes. But it will cause no little disappointment. To our orthodox friends it will give many a shock. Many proof texts and doctrinal landmarks have disappeared. The contentions of the scholars of our churches have, in nearly every case, been sustained. But there are blemishes, compromises, and proofs of timidity which mar the completeness of the work, and will some day necessitate a further revision. Still we ought to be thankful for what we have got, and to make the best use we can of it. Our

readers can purchase it in various editions at the Depository.

With the summer season has come a brief cessation of some of the numerous activities of our Churches. The Sunday Evening Lectures are over at Second Rosemary Street, and Mount-pottinger, the various Mutual Improvement Associations have adjourned for their summer vacation, and the classes for different studies are resting from their labours. We hope preachers, teachers, and pupils alike will enjoy their season of rest, and after a while come back to their duties with increased strength, and renewed earnestness of purpose.

THE first meeting of the General Council of the Unitarian Society was held at 33 Donegall St., Belfast, on Wednesday, May 12th, Mr. Darbishire, the retiring President, in the Chair.

Letters of regret for unavoidable absence were read from E. Gardner, Esq., LL.B., Downpatrick, and Rev. H. Rylett, of Moneyrea.

The Rev. J. C. Street said that the first business of the day, according to their constitution, was the election of a President. He ventured to make a suggestion which he thought would be unanimously approved, namely, that Thos. McClelland, Esq., J.P., should be the President for the year. Mr. McClelland had long been an active and influential member of the Executive Committee, and had proved in a thousand ways his hearty devotion to the interests of the Society. He felt sure the motion would command general approval in the Council, and in the Society.

J. F. Mulligan, Esq., gladly seconded the motion, and said a more suitable appointment could not be made.

The resolution was unanimously adopted, whereupon Mr. McClelland, in taking the Chair, expressed his high sense of the honour conferred upon him, and said it would be at once a pride and a pleasure to do his very best to follow in the footsteps of Mr. Darbishire, who had so admirably presided over the affairs of the Society during its Jubilee year. He felt sure that Mr. Darbishire and the officers would lend him their aid

in the discharge of his own duties during the year.

The Rev. J. C. Street moved, and E. A. Fuhr, Esq., seconded, and it was unanimously resolved, "That the hearty thanks of the Society are due, and are hereby tendered, to J. M. Darbishire, Esq., the retiring President, for the admirable manner in which he had discharged the duties of his office during the Jubilee year of the Society."

Mr. Darbishire in responding said that the year just ended had been the most successful in the history of the Society, and that the proceedings in connection with the Jubilee were of the most cheering and inspiring character. He thanked the Council and the Society for the kind way in which they had recognised the services he had so gladly rendered during the time of his office.

The following Gentlemen were then appointed Vice-Presidents for the year:—John Bennett, (Solitude), Henry Burden, M.D., E. P. Cowan, J.P., J. M. Darbishire, Herbert Darbishire, William Dobbin, J. F. Hodges, M.D., Robert Hunter, M.D., (Larne), E. A. Fuhr, F.W. Kidd, (Dundalk), John Miller, J.P. (Comber), Rev. W. B. Miniss, (Dromore), W. G. Mulligan, Rev. S. C. Nelson, M.A., (Downpatrick), Rev. John Porter (Ballee), W. B. Ritchie, M.D., J.P., Wm. Robertson, and Rev. J. C. Street.

The following Ladies and Gentlemen were then appointed as the Sunday School Committee for the year:—Miss J. E. Bruce, Miss Coe, Miss Coleman, Miss Darbishire, Miss M. Davidson, Miss Dobbin, Miss May, J. M. Darbishire, Rev. T. Dunkerley, Rev. J. A. Kelly, James McQuoid, Rev. H. Rylett, Rev. F. Thomas, Rev. J. J. Wright, with the Secretaries Rev. J. C. Street, and R. M'Calmont, Esq., F.C.S.

It was then resolved on the motion of J. M. Darbishire, Esq., seconded by Rev. J. J. Wright, that, in order to free the funds of the Society from any extra liabilities, a special subscription be raised to defray all the expenses connected with the Jubilee. The resolution was unanimously adopted.

The Rev. J. C. Street said that a new plan of usefulness in connection with their Society had been suggested, which seemed to him both feasible and serviceable, namely, the establishment of a circulating Library in the Depository. It was believed that many persons would gladly avail themselves of an opportunity of reading the best theological and philosophical literature

of the day, who could not afford to purchase the books, and who had no other opportunities of procuring them, but who would be very willing to pay a small sum for the loan of them. Inasmuch as the object of the Society was not to make a profit, nor even necessarily to sell books, but to spread the principles of liberal and life-giving Religion, he thought that this plan might prove an efficient means of promoting this good object. He suggested that the matter should be referred to the Executive Committee with an instruction that it should be considered and dealt with by them.

Mr. Darbishire, Miss Bruce, Rev. J. J. Wright, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Mulligan, and the President concurred in the suggestion and it was decided to lay it before the Executive Committee.

It was announced that there had been a few days delay in the issue of the May number of the *Chronicle and Index*, in order that a report might be given of the Jubilee Meetings, and that an extra two pages had been issued.

The meeting then terminated.

THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY, BELFAST.

THIS Society having completed the fiftieth year of its existence, it was fitting that so interesting an event should be celebrated by the series of meetings which we report elsewhere. The past half century has probably been the most remarkable in our history. There have been many changes, and all for the most part beneficial. Of course these changes have been opposed, but if there had been no friction, goodness only knows where we would have been by this time. There are many changes to be noted in the Unitarian Society, Belfast, too, but sad as it may seem to some, we are unable to see why providence should have been expected to make an exception to the general law of change in favour of such an institution, exemplary as it is in every way. And so there have been changes, such as we hope and believe will in the long run prove to be of a highly salutary character. Now the Unitarian Society of Belfast is conducted on the principles of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, as Mr. EILOART, the representative of the larger society, very appropriately and effectively pointed out. Not only is this the case, but the Belfast Society, is engaged in a work exactly analogous to that

which tasks the energies of the British and Foreign. We venture to say, therefore, that the Belfast society deserves the cordial sympathy of English Unitarians, and we hesitate not to add that the sympathy will not be confined to mere sentiment if the time should come when the supporters of the Unitarian Society should appeal to England for practical help. The task before the Belfast Unitarian Society is an exceedingly difficult one. It should be remembered that there are very few large towns in Ireland; that the population is mainly agricultural; that the growth of ideas is accordingly not nearly so rapid as in England. The healthy Liberalism of the Intuitional philosophy has scarcely yet permeated the general body of Irish Unitarians; much less can it be said to have had any serious effect upon the country at large. It must be borne in mind, therefore, that there is much uphill work before the small knot of Unitarians who are the apostles of this new light, which has already shed such sweet radiance over the religious life of England, and to some extent of Scotland too. The mere struggle for existence in Ireland, at the present time, is of such a character, that, as we pointed out on a previous occasion, Unitarianism must really be accounted successful if it only succeeds in holding its own for a considerable time to come. When a comfortable subsistence is once assured to the people, and education makes more rapid strides, then we may expect that the stern Calvinistic theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith will proclaim its own insufficiency. In the meantime the Unitarian Society of Belfast must maintain the even tenor of its way.

And now that the Society enters upon another period of existence we are not aware that there is anything to say except this: that its principles of free inquiry after truth should be newly inscribed upon its banner, and that those who believe in those principles should close up their ranks and go forward. There is everything to do. Let those who conduct the Society's affairs show that they are worthy guardians of the sacred principles which the Society represents. That is all that is required of them; but it is much. The Unitarians of England will come one day to understand that the battlings which have so shocked them were not mere personal wranglings, though they may often have been tainted with personalities. It will come to be understood that what has been fought

for is nothing more nor less than this: that the great principles of modern Unitarianism, as they are understood in England, should have a lodgement in Ireland. Of course it is desirable that the real issue should be understood in England; but it is only necessary in so far as practical help may be necessary. So long as the Unitarian Society can pay its own way, and do all the work it requires to do without aid from England, it has little need to concern itself with standing ill or well with English Unitarian opinion. It is desirable that there should be no misunderstanding. It is desirable that English Unitarians should be fully alive to the fact that the Unitarian Society of Belfast does really stand for precisely what the British and Foreign Unitarian Society stands for—nothing more, nothing less. But the main business of the Belfast Society is to go on with its work and trust to time for its vindication. Stopping to explain is after all only a slow way of getting on. It proves nothing that the members of the Society are few and even comparatively feeble. Numbers and strength do not always carry the day. But faithfulness never fails of victory.

There are many indications that Ireland is being affected by the Liberal thought of the day, though there are no results yet to speak of. But it is certain, as Mr. Street said at one of the meetings last week, that the movement in Scotland will greatly affect Ireland before many years are over. It remains to be seen whether those who now constitute the Unitarian Society of Belfast, will be really equal to the opportunity presented to them. Their work will certainly be hard, but the greater will be the glory of its successful prosecution. All that is needed is faithfulness. Harmony of purpose, with mutual consideration and diligence, will work wonders. Another fifty years of patient endeavour and of positive preaching will witness results as little to be imagined now as were the results of to-day fifty years ago.

We cannot conclude without remarking upon the circumstance, that at the conference on Tuesday afternoon, the venerable and reverend Samuel Craig Nelson occupied the chair. It should be an instructive fact to the men of a younger generation. Mr. Nelson was one of a noble band who bore the heat and burden of a great day. That in his old age he should be regarded with such universal affection and esteem, bears eloquent testimony to the fact that the

path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. Mr. Nelson, we rejoice to think, remains a Vice-President of the Society; and that simple circumstance, together with the fact that other esteemed men—the Rev. W. B. Miniss and the Rev. John M'Caw—still retain their connection with the Society, is sufficient to show that it has maintained its proper attitude; and we can only hope that there may be found at the end of another fifty years men as faithful as these, to give the Society the strength of their confidence and sympathy. (Copied from *Inquirer*.)

BOOK NOTICES.

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A book of rare merit: telling the story of Jesus from a purely human point of view, and making a living picture of the Great Teacher and his Times. It discards all supernaturalism and superstition, and deals with a human story in a human way. The Teacher stands out amid his natural surroundings, naturally. He attracts by his very humanness. The writer knows his theme, and treats it worthily. Whoever wants to get away from the fancies, and theories, and creeds, in which the great Nazarene Prophet is absolutely lost, let him read this book. It will have all the charm of freshness, and Jesus will appear in new and nobler guise, and will command a more genuine admiration and love. We do not know who the writer is, but he has done his work worthily.

The price of the book at the Depository is 2/10, and we shall be disappointed if it does not command many purchasers.

"*What Must I Do to be Saved?*" By Col. Rob. Ingersoll. Third Edition. Price Threepence.

A most striking and original production. Marred by many inelegancies of diction and illustration, and suited better for the rough western life of America than for English readers, it, nevertheless, in most vigorous and powerful language, strikes the most damaging blows against the orthodox superstition of salvation by belief, and sets forth with the plainest and most logical common sense a religion better adapted to the life of the world. The defects of the pamphlet are only superficial mannerisms, many of which are due to the injudicious reprint of a newspaper report, and would certainly have been removed by the author himself, but its merits are great and lasting. Col. Ingersoll is a bold reformer. His blows are heavy as those from Thor's hammer. He destroys error relentlessly. But he enshrines truth nobly on the altar of human intelligence. We heartily commend the pamphlet, and think all our readers will thank us for directing their attention to it.

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